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ABSTRACT

Family socialization patterns were examined from the viewpoint of the child and the parent in terms of parental socialization practices, attitudes, and goals. Questionnaires were developed and used to collect data on the parents of about 1,300 families and the children (7-13 years old) of approximately 400 families in West Germany. Results of studies using the questionnaires showed that there is a very complex relationship between the parents' concept of the child's personality and the parents' self-perceived parental attitudes. Specific childrearing attitudes seem to be related to general personality characteristics of the parents. Child-perceived maternal attitudes appear to be more strongly related to the child's intelligence than child-perceived paternal attitudes. However, perceived paternal goals seem to be of higher value than perceived maternal goals in predicting the child's intelligence. Another study analyzed children's internal vs. external control orientation and its parental antecedents. Future research is anticipated which will examine parental socialization behavior and children's personalities, and intervention programs to change certain aspects of parental behavior are planned. (BRT)

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Psychological and socio-ecological aspects of parent - child relations: overview of a research project and some selected empirical findings

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1. Outline

During the next 20 minutes I'd like to give you a brief account of a research project entitled "Psychological and socio-ecological aspects of parent - child relations". As you can see from its title the project belongs to the broader field of family socialization. I gratefully acknowledge funding of the project on a long-term basis by the German Science Foundation which allows for a more continuous work of our research-team.

To begin with I'll give you a brief outline of what I'm going to talk about: First I'd like to discuss some of the reasons and motivations which led us into a more extensive analysis of familial socialization processes. Second I'll put forward a few terminological proposals which might help to pin down more accurately some of the more relevant theoretical and methodological issues dealing with a psychological analysis of family socialization. Third I'd like to acquaint you with the major research phases of our project. Fourth I'll give you an idea of some of the measuring and assessment devices which have been developed so far in our project, and fifth I'll briefly summarize some of our more recent research findings on the correlates of parental socialization variables.

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2. Some thoughts on the conceptualization and scope of the parent - child relations project

Although it seems to be a truism that early and long-lasting learning experiences within the familial context are vital

to a better understanding of an individual's present state and future development, there is nevertheless relatively little systematic empirical evidence on how the individual's intrafamilial socialization experiences affect his behavior in general, i.e. his intra- and extrafamilial behavior. Despite the growing body of literature in the field of family socialization I believe that the impact of reciprocal interaction on both parents and children, is far from being well-understood.

If one is willing to accept the notion that the three major goals of a psychology of socialization which, as far as I can see, has still to be conceptualized in its programmatic outlines, are description, explanation, and modification of the behavioral and non-behavioral influences which seem to be potentially relevant for an adequate study of socialization processes, then one might also agree on the following principles:

(1) On a purely descriptive level a detailed and comprehensive analysis of content- and setting-specific patterns of family interaction has to be worked out. Hence, two- or threedimensional taxonomies of parent - child behavior, as they are usually found in the literature, will not provide a better understanding of the structure and processes of familial interaction.

(2) On an explanatory level the development of particular styles of socialization behavior has to be traced with respect to the individual, social and ecological conditions involved.

(3) The impact and amount of influence of parental behavior on the child's personality and its future development has to be systematically evaluated. This does not imply, of course, a merely unidirectional path of influence leading from parents to children but includes - among other things - an analysis of the socialization capacities of children themselves.

(4) Granted that there are distinguishable patterns of parental behavior which have a bearing on the child's personality development, specific family intervention programs aiming

at the optimization of well-defined and consensually accepted developmental goals should be designed and empirically evaluated.

3. Some terminological proposals

Let me turn now to some terminological proposals. First the term "parental behavior" has to be looked at more closely. I'd like to suggest subdivision of this term into three more handy concepts (SCHNEEWIND, 1975a), namely

(a) parental socialization practices which include all kinds of overt parental behavior explicitly related or directed to a particular child;

(b) parental socialization attitudes which, on a descriptive level, comprise those cognitions, feelings, and behavioral dispositions which parents hold in view of a particular child;

(c) parental socialization goals which refer to all behavioral expectations and prescriptions held by parents with respect to a particular child.

Presuming that familial socialization processes can be studied from at least three different points of view, i.e. from the viewpoint of an independent observer, the child and the parent, the latter two are of particular interest since they represent the cognitions of the genuine participants in ongoing family interaction. Therefore, we may distinguish between self-perceived parental behavior and child-perceived parental behavior with its various conceptual subclasses, i.e. practices, attitudes and goals.

This point is of special importance since available research demonstrates that there are only weak relationships - if any at all - between parents' and children's conceptions of parental behavior. Furthermore, there is some empirical evidence that child-perceived parental behavior is of higher predictive value for a great variety of child personality variables than the parents' cognitions of their own socialization behavior.

4. Phases of the parent - child relations project

With these more general considerations in mind I'd like to briefly outline the major research phases of the parent - child relations project (SCHNEEWIND, ENGFER, FILIPP & HOFFMANN, 1974a).

(1) The first phase concentrates on the development of appropriate measuring instruments to assess the various self-perceived and child-perceived aspects of parental behavior. On the basis of careful analyses of available literature and extensive interviews and group discussions in which more than 300 parents, children, teachers, nurses etc. participated, we gathered as many concrete statements on parent-child interactions as possible. This material served as a starting point for various questionnaire type instruments. Parents of about 1300 families participated in this study. For about 400 families the corresponding child-perceived data were secured, the children being 7 to 13 years old. The sample constitutes a fairly representative selection of West German families. Along with these data some information on the parents' and the children's personality were gathered. Furthermore, comprehensive socio-demographic data including the socio-ecological situation of the family were collected.

(2) The second phase of this project will be started in late summer of this year. Using economical versions of the newly developed assessment devices to sample the relevant parental socialization variables this phase, particularly, will probe into the consequences of specific patterns of parental socialization behavior with special emphasis on the child's personality and its developmental perspectives.

(3) In a third phase we plan to develop a series of intervention programs to change those aspects of parental behavior which seem to be interdependently related to the child's personality. It is hoped that the effects of those interventive approaches will eventually contribute to the optimization of parent child - relations and their more general consequences for both parents and children.

5. Some newly developed instruments for the study of parent - child relations

I'll now turn to some examples of the newly developed instruments for the study of parent - child relations. I'll concentrate, however, on those instruments only which were designed to map parental attitudes and parental goals.

To assess self-perceived parental attitudes we constructed a ten-dimensional questionnaire (SCHNEEWIND & ENGFER, 1975) which includes the following scales: (I) parental self-criticism vs. self-confidence, (II) emotional involvement vs. rejection, (III) permissiveness vs. restrictiveness, (IV) frankness vs. reservedness while communicating with children, (V) manipulation and intrusiveness vs. discreet distance, (VI) high vs. low acceptance of parental responsibility, (VII) reflectiveness vs. spontaneity, (VIII) high vs. low influence of parental personality characteristics on parent child interaction, (IX) acceptance vs. disapproval of traditional educational standards, (X) consistency vs. inconsistency of parental discipline.

A similar seven-dimensional questionnaire was constructed to assess parental attitudes from the children's point of view (SCHNEEWIND, ENGFER, FILIPP & HOFFMANN, 1974b). We labelled the dimensions as follows: (I) parental indulgence vs. lack of understanding, (II) tolerance vs. control, (III) strict enforcement of parental standards vs. complaisance, (IV) high vs. low parental manipulation, (V) high vs. low parental empathy concerning the child's feelings, (VI) parental support vs. lack of helpfulness, (VII) parental contact-seeking vs. disregard.

Concerning parental socialization goals the following seven goal dimensions as perceived by the parents themselves were found: (I) obedience, (II) social acceptance, (III) religiosity, (IV) social leadership and demonstration of social prestige, (V) submissiveness, (VI) independence and (VII) achievement orientation. An analysis of parental socialization

goals from the children's point of view also evidenced a seven-dimensional structure. Content-wise the seven dimensions proved to be rather similar to those found for the parents' self-perceived educational goals.

6. Some selected empirical findings

Finally, I'd like to acquaint you with some selected empirical findings of our research. This might give you an idea of the kind and strength of relations between parental socialization variables and more general personality characteristics.

6.1. Self-perceived parental attitudes and the parents' concept of the child's personality

In one study we were interested in the relationships between the parents' concept of the child's personality and the parents' self-perceived parental attitudes. The parents' concept of the child's personality was assessed by a set of bipolar rating scales using descriptive personality traits (ENGFER & SCHNEEWIND, 1975). The analysis resulted in rather complex relationships. It turned out that - depending on the type of sex constellation of the parent-child dyad, i.e. mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son and father-daughter relation - three to five significant canonical correlations ranging between R = .30 and R = .60 were found. Let me give you just one example: mothers who describe their daughters as being more intelligent, inventive, sensitive, flexible and self-disclosing but also a bit superficial tend to hold the following attitudes: frank and uninhibited expression of feelings vis-a-vis their children, and a higher degree of permissiveness and reflectiveness. On the other hand there is a lack of maternal manipulation and intrusiveness into the child's private affairs. In addition these mothers appear to reject traditional standards of child education as experienced, e.g., in their own socialization history. Of course, it cannot be argued on the basis of canonical correlation analysis that this particular configuration of personality characteristics which might constitute something like a "creativity syndrome" is a direct function or consequence of a particular pattern of maternal attitudes. It seems to make sense, however, that the

expression of creativity-related behavior will have a better chance of being fostered in a climate of maternal permissiveness, unconventionality and frankness.

6.2. Self-perceived parental attitudes and the parents' personality

In a second study we looked at the relation between parental socialization attitudes and the parents' personality structure as assessed by Cattell's 16 Personality Factors inventory (SCHNEEWIND, ENGFER & FILIPP, 1973).

In a series of multiple regression analyses all ten parental attitude dimensions served as criterion variables whereas the 16 PF scales were treated as predictors. The corresponding multiple correlations ranged between R = .23 and R = .60, almost all of them being statistically significant. Let me pick out just one example for the purpose of illustration. Parental self-criticism and feelings of insufficiency in dealing with child-rearing problems, e.g., is multiply correlated with the 16 PF dimensions at R = .46. Taking a closer look at the most predictive 16 PF scales it turns out that parents with a high score on parental self-criticism tend to be more affected by feelings and emotionally unstable (16 PF, scale C = lower ego strength); they are less controlled and self-disciplined (16 PF, scale Q_3 = low integration); they are more apprehensive and guilt-prone (16 PF, scale O = guilt proneness); and they tend to be more tense and frustrated (16 PF, scale Q_4 = high ergic tension). Altogether this pattern of 16 PF primaries corresponds rather nicely to Cattell's second order Factor called "emotional adjustment vs. anxiety". Thus, specific child-rearing attitudes seem to be plausibly related to more general personality characteristics of the parents.

6.3. Child-perceived parental attitudes and goals and their relation to the child's intellectual achievement

In a third study we took a look at the predictive value of child-perceived parental socialization attitudes and goals with respect to the child's intellectual achievement (DARPE,

DARPE & SCHNEEWIND, 1975). The intellectual achievement scores were obtained from a German version of Thurstone's Primary Mental Abilities Test. In accordance with similar results by other writers we found that only those intelligence factors which presumably are more influenced by environmental variables yielded substantial multiple correlations with parental socialization variables. Hence, only for numerical ability and verbal intelligence we found multiple correlations of R = .50 and R = .45 with parental attitudes and goals. Upon closer inspection it turns out that perceived maternal attitudes seem to be more strongly related to the child's intelligence than the paternal attitudes. On the other hand, however, perceived paternal goals seem to be of higher predictive value than maternal goals.

To give you an example: the children's verbal intelligence, e.g., is significantly correlated with perceived maternal tolerance and lack of manipulation, and also with perceived paternal empathy. With respect to parental goals children perceive both their mothers and their fathers as being more concerned about qualified education. Moreover, fathers are perceived to be less interested in the maintenance of religious values; they also request less submissiveness and find it less important to ostensibly demonstrate social prestige. On the other hand fathers are seen as being more concerned about independence and autonomy in their children.

In sum there seem to be rather plausible and within a cognitive social learning framework well-interpretable relations between some intellectual achievement scores and specific parental socialization attitudes and goals.

6.4. Child-perceived parental socialization behavior and internal vs. external locus of control

The last study I'd like to talk about very briefly has to do with the children's internal vs. external control orientation and its parental antecedents (SCHNEEWIND, 1975b). As you know from the work of Julian Rotter and his associates the

locus of control construct is related to an individual's belief that he has more or less control over the response-contingent consequences of his behavior. It can be hypothesized that internal vs. external control expectations are at least partly related to specific patterns of parental socialization variables. In the present study the locus of control construct was assessed by a German adaptation of the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale for Children. In a multiple regression analysis parental socialization and goals served as predictors whereas the locus of control measure was treated as criterion variable. The analysis resulted in a multiple correlation of R = .59 for the total sample. It should be noted, however, that there are marked differences when the various relational types of parent-child dyads, i.e. mother-son, mother-daughter and so forth, were analyzed separately. For the total sample it can be shown that internality is significantly related to parental indulgence, tolerance, lack of manipulation, a high degree of helpfulness and parental sharing of their children's activities. Looking at those parental goals which proved to be most predictive for internal control expectations we found that parents were perceived as being less concerned about their children's obedience, submissiveness, religiosity and social conformity. On the other hand parents of children with a high score on internality were perceived as granting more independence and personal freedom to their children.

These findings add to recent research evidence which says that a person's self-responsibility and personal autonomy is rather strongly related to a distinct pattern of intra-familial socialization experiences. Again, these findings can be interpreted with reference to a social learning point of view.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, I'm glad if this very brief outline of our project has given you an illustrative example of the type of research on family socialization presently going on in

our country. Beyond that you might perhaps agree with me that a better understanding of family socialization will eventually pave the way for a better understanding of those primary learning contexts which seem to be most important for optimal human development.

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